

Instead, it invites the opposing parties and the general public to arrive at a consensus on the broader issue of conflicting rights.

This is our choice. We hope that attitudes will evolve and that each of us will become aware of the worth of others, with respect for the self. We invite the Royal Canadian Legion to examine the opinions just published by the Quebec human rights commission.

[English]

Mr. Jim Hart (Okanagan—Similkameen—Merritt, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak on Motion No. 310.

My fellow colleague's attack against the Royal Canadian Legion, an independent association of veterans who risked their lives to fight racism and oppression, is in my opinion unfounded.

The Royal Canadian Legion is not an organization permeated with bigots and racists—far from it. The legion is an organization of war veterans with their own valued customs and traditions to show respect for their fallen comrades.

Their methods of showing respect are their own and should not be subject to parliamentary inquiry. I feel strongly that my colleague has misinterpreted the whole issue.

During the 35th dominion convention of the Royal Canadian Legion which was held in Calgary from May 29 to June 2, 1994 the legion passed a resolution:

Branch bylaws or house rules shall include a provision for the wearing of head-dress in the premises and when doing so must provide that religious head-dress is not considered to constitute head-dress in the traditional sense.

Therefore, once a person who is required to wear head-dress by his faith has been accepted as a Legion member, or invited as a guest to a Legion branch, he is authorized admission to all areas of that branch that are normally open to the general membership or invited guests.

● (1805)

This bylaw clearly states that once a branch allows an individual in as a member or as a guest that individual will have access to all areas of the branch regardless of religious head-dress. This is a sensible policy.

However, individual branches can comply with this bylaw as they see fit due to their grassroots independence from the dominion command. Individual legion branches have the right to accept or refuse all new members, period, regardless of head-dress. Therefore, the legion has taken effective action to ensure that all Canadians have access to their facilities.

Private Members' Business

President of the Royal Canadian Legion, Mr. Hugh Greene, stated after the convention: "It is wrong to say that the convention banned turbans. The delegates did not vote to ban religious head-dress from branches. The vote was to rescind a national general bylaw that imposed a dress regulation on branches. This decision took the responsibility for branch head-dress rules back into the hands of the branches".

I find it hard to comprehend why my colleague wants this decision reversed. As she states in her motion:

—urge the Royal Canadian Legion and its constituent branches to reconsider their recent decision.

Is the return to a national general bylaw imposing a dress regulation in the best interest of all Canadians? I do not think so. I think it is important for Parliament to respect the right of organizations such as the legion to make and maintain their own bylaws. Nobody in Parliament would question the bylaws of the Kiwanis Club or the Optimist Club. Besides, the Royal Canadian Legion has been very generous in its interpretation of its customs. The vast majority of legion branches are following the resolutions passed by the conventions.

If the members across the way would listen for a minute, the statement made was that the vast majority of legion branches are following the resolution passed by the convention.

John Spellman, professor of Asian studies at the University of Windsor, documented that in the past 67 years and out of a membership of nearly 700,000 there have been fewer than six cases in all in Canada involving turbaned Sikhs not being admitted to Legion halls. No person of Jewish descent has ever been turned away. The Human Rights Commission has only ever decided against a legion branch once. Many veterans who require head-dress for religious reasons have been legion members for years.

My colleague's motion has called into question the integrity of the Royal Canadian Legion and I feel strongly that I must set the record straight. I would like to take this opportunity to tell the House what kind of organization the Royal Canadian Legion is.

We all know the legion was formed after the great war to help veterans secure adequate pensions and other well earned benefits for them and their families. Today's Royal Canadian Legion has many other stated purposes and objectives which include bringing about the unity of all who have served their country, furthering the spirit of camaraderie, striving for peace, goodwill and friendship among all nations, co-operating with the commonwealth and allied associations with similar aims and encouraging, promoting and engaging in or supporting all forms of national, provincial, municipal and community service or any other charitable purpose.

Today's Royal Canadian Legion benefits everyone in this room and all Canadians.